

Concord-Alewife Planning Study

Meeting Notes: October 15, 2003 Committee Meeting

Committee Members Present: Patricia Amoroso, Joe Barrell, Peg Callahan, Mitch Goldstein, Chuck Mabardy, Hom Sack, Ann Tennis, Peter White, Al Wilson

City of Cambridge Staff: Stuart Dash, Iram Farooq, Susan Glazer, Taha Jennings, Catherine Preston, Catherine Woodbury

Consultants: David Dixon, Ron Mallis, Herb Nolan, Christine Scott

Welcome & Introduction

The next Committee Meeting is scheduled for November 12, 2003. The next Public Meeting will be on December 10 at the Tobin School. Handouts for this evening include the agenda and a copy of the Goals Matrix.

Presentation of Goals Matrix and Update on Land Use and Urban Design Principles

David Dixon noted that the land use discussions and decisions will be reflected in the words of the zoning language and other implementation strategies. He reviewed the general ideas in the Goals Matrix that respond to the Committee's discussion over the past few months on issues of land use and density, infrastructure, stormwater management, and open space, traffic and transportation, and housing. There was Committee discussion and general agreement with the principles. (Additional comments should be sent to the Community Development Department).

As details of the plan are developed, the goals will be reflected in the inclusion of a proposed street system, land use and density, public realm, and environmental strategies for the area. It was also pointed out that a goal of the plan would be to ensure that the next generation of development creates less traffic than the current zoning would permit and include features that allow it to capitalize on its location near transit and increase accessibility to non-auto forms of transportation.

Herb Nolan presented a possible civic realm plan to illustrate how new roadway rights of way could be used to increase connections as well as provide additional access and civic space throughout the Study Area. The streets were shown to have a variety of characters. Reflecting discussions at the Committee and recommendations from the June public meeting, the plan included a central park that also served stormwater function for the area and a green and open space buffer between the Highlands and the Quadrangle. In addition, a crossing over the railroad tracks would connect the Quadrangle and the Triangle enhancing access between the two areas, to the Alewife Reservation, and to Alewife station. Christine Scott reviewed an example of a residential urban block that could be developed to include stormwater management techniques and how these ideas could be applied on a site-by-site basis in the Study Area.

Committee Discussion:

What would the heights be near the Highlands?

Heights would be lower close to the Highlands (approximately 3-4 stories) to create an appropriate transition to the Quadrangle, with taller heights allowed further away.

How wide is the buffer between the research and development areas and the Highlands?

The dimension of the buffer is not finalized, but it is envisioned as a generous width -- approximately 200 feet wide as shown on the map.

Blanchard Road needs more study to deal with issues associated with the heavier trucks using it.

Transportation issues, including issues associated with Blanchard Road, will be the topic of the next meeting.

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Why are light industrial uses shown close the Highlands?

The idea was to locate low density uses with low traffic generation furthest from transit. However, there needs to be more thought about the character of the area and ways to ensure that any new development is a good neighbor.

Is too much residential use planned for the area? Will new housing zone out businesses?

The plan allows for a range of uses. The emphasis on housing is a response to the more resilient housing market and the benefits that can result from a vibrant, mixed-use district. The plan will provide for a dynamic mix of uses in the future and the relationship between housing and commercial uses will be carefully considered as the plan moves forward.

The plan shows a significant transformation for the area. Will this result in undue burdens on small property owners can?

The intent of the plan is not to burden small property owners. In fact, the goal is that implementation of the plan that the Committee recommends would result in improvements in the Study Area that would unlock value for property owners as well as neighbors. Over the next few months, the Committee will look at implementation to address the mechanisms for change.

Will the electrical substation be a deterrent for new development?

It is possible that the sub station parcel's use will change sometime in the distant future, although it appears unlikely in the near term. Relocating it would be very expensive and in its current use, high clearances are required over the sub station making air rights development difficult.

A meeting of businesses and property owners to inform them about the planning process would help to keep people interested and involved in the process.

Notice of public meetings for the project are mailed to all property owners within the Study Area, both residential and non-residential. A targeted meeting with business owners is being considered.

The Alewife MBTA Station parking garage is full and has the capacity for additional decks— will additional decks be built?

The Alewife station was designed to accommodate two additional levels, which were not built due to opposition from neighboring residents. Additional parking decks at Alewife Station won't necessarily increase the capacity of what can happen in the area. Increasing the capacity of the existing Alewife parking garage merits its own process, which would be the responsibility of the MBTA.

Next Steps/Wrap Up

It was agreed that Al Wilson would be given an opportunity to share his plan for the study area during a future meeting. The next Committee meeting will be on Wednesday, November 12, 2003. The meeting will focus on Transportation and the first round of testing future trip growth under the land use assumptions as compared to trip growth under existing zoning.

Public Comment:

Areas of discussion during the public comment period included Traffic and transportation, cooperation between Cambridge and Belmont, and stormwater and infrastructure issues.

Traffic and Transportation

The issue of whether or not there should be a significant reliance in the plan on the MBTA Alewife rail station when there is a bus line along Concord Avenue with direct links to Harvard Square was brought up. It was suggested that there should be places to wait for the bus along Concord Avenue. There was also a suggestion that structured parking and shuttle buses should be part of future plans for the area. There was some uncertainty expressed on whether the number of citizens from this area that actually travel into Boston and Cambridge support what seems to be a reliance on the transit system in the land use plan. There was also concern about the number of additional cars on Blanchard Road. Several members of the public cautioned that more

development could mean the potential of more cars on Blanchard Road and the area's roads in general.

Cooperation between Cambridge and Belmont

It was noted that there is currently cooperation between Cambridge and Belmont in addressing stormwater issues, particularly through the Tri-Community Working Group, and that there should also be cooperation on development and land use issues. There was concern regarding new residential development already planned in Belmont, and how development in both municipalities might impact open space resources and wildlife in the area. Some of the ideas shared included expanding the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA) detention area, exploring ways to achieve smart growth through cooperation, and considering where the benefit of the value that will be created in the area will actually go.

Stormwater and infrastructure

There was concern expressed about how realistic the plan currently is, and that it is important to ensure that the final plan for the area will be realistic and the infrastructure needs will be met. There was a desire expressed to have floodplain information for the area presented graphically. It was noted that the pollution risks associated with overcapacity of the stormwater and sewage system should be considered in the plan.